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ARGUING WITH BOB

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ARGUING WITH BOB

"What's the matter, Bob? You seem to be puzzled about something."

"Oh, I can't do this Latin. Won't you let me drop it, Dad? I don't see what good it's ever going to do me anyhow."

"Can't do it? You don't mean that. Miss Gates tells me you do it very well and that she thinks you are a boy who is able to appreciate it and profit by it. She says, however, that you have let up in your effort lately. Why the slump?"

"Well, Joe Fordham has dropped it. His father says it isn't practical and he wants Joe to study things that he can use."

"Ah, I see. You have got under the cold-water bath of the 'practical' fellow, have you? Let me ask you. Do you especially admire the kind of an education that Harvey Fordham has?"

"I don't know. I wish you had as much money as Mr. Fordham has."

"He surely can make money—but would you call him an educated man?"

"No, of course not. All he thinks of is making money. I guess I wouldn't want him for a father. He doesn't know anything but soap, and Joe's getting to be just the same."

"This is sort of an *argumentum ad hominem*, I fear, son, if you get the sense of that

Latin; but I want you to get the idea firmly fixed in your brain that money is not the only thing and that money-grubbers rarely give good educational advice, although the narrower they are the more likely they are to think themselves educational experts. It is not so simple a matter to be educated."

"Joe says his father says he wants Joe to know how to earn a living the first thing."

"So do I want you to know how to earn a living. But any one can do that, Bob. One may even become a millionaire and remain ignorant. Isn't that so?"

"I know that. Old Perkins is as rich as anything, and his stenographer has to do his spelling for him. She told mother so. I heard her."

"But he prides himself on being 'practical' and gives a lot of free advice to the school board."

"I shouldn't want to be like him. But what's the use of studying a dead language? Why not study French and German?"

"I want you to study French and German. But you have plenty of time. 'Rome was not built in a day.' You are to live for a lifetime, my boy. You can afford to prepare well. But what do you mean by a 'dead language'?"

"Why, they don't talk Latin any more, do they?"

"Don't they? I suppose they don't talk English any more either, since they do not use the speech of Chaucer. Haven't you learned that Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and several other languages are almost wholly Latin? Latin is just as much alive as French."

"You'll be saying next that Greek is alive."

"Indeed, it is, and it has been alive for three thousand years in speech and literature. What

language do you suppose they talk in Greece to-day?"

"I don't know. I never thought. Do they talk Greek the same as they used to?"

"Not quite the same, of course, but the modern Greek is much more nearly like the ancient Greek than modern English is like the language of Chaucer. And from ten to twenty millions of people speak it daily."

"But they don't learn to speak Latin or Greek in the schools?"

"Sometimes they do. That is not the only test of the value of learning a language, however. Any hotel clerk or barber in Europe can speak three or four languages besides his own, but he is no more educated than the average barber or clerk in America."

"Frank Hamilton's father says he wants him to learn to speak German and French so he can talk when he goes abroad."

"Well and good. But not one out of a thousand boys in our schools will ever go abroad."

"But there are lots of foreigners in this country."

"And in three months after they arrive they can usually talk English better than Frank will be able to talk German in three years. Conditions in America are different from what they are in Europe, and there are better reasons for learning a language than to have to speak it."

"Joe's father says that Anglo-Saxon is good enough for him."

"That reminds me. I recently read the advice: 'Avoid Latin derivatives. Use terse, pure, simple Saxon.' How many Saxon words do you suppose there are in those two sentences?"

"How many?"

"One; the word 'Saxon.' The other seven words are all Latin. Did you know that three-fourths of the words in English are Greek and Latin?"

"No. Is that so?"

"Yes, and the Greek and Latin and Anglo-Saxon words usually have such different meanings. For example, 'physician' is Greek; 'doctor' is Latin; 'healer' is Saxon. You couldn't use 'healer' for all three meanings, could you?"

"How did all those Greek and Latin words get into English?"

"The majority of them entered in early days as the language was developing. Scores, if not hundreds, of words are coming in every year. In fact, the principal additions to English today come from Greek and Latin. Such words as phonograph, telescope, and dynamo are Greek and have come in with the inventions of which they are the names. Practically all our scientific terms are Greek or Latin. Take words like antiseptic, clinic, bacteria — and the best joke on the 'practical' man is that the very word 'practical' is Greek."

"Do you mean that a fellow ought to study Latin and Greek so as to understand English?"

"Precisely. That is, if he expects to get more than a superficial knowledge of English. He ought to learn more English by the study of Greek and Latin than in any other way."

"More than by studying English itself?"

"Quite so. Say nothing of the time when his own advances in science or invention may make it necessary for him to bring new words into the language himself."

"If that is so, I think I begin to see why I should keep on with my Latin."

"Well, it is so. And there are other rea-

sons. For one, the study of these rather complex languages teaches you the structure of your own. There is nothing so good as the practice of translating to make one able to understand what he reads, and capable of expressing his own thoughts in terse, vigorous English. Another reason is that the literature which has been left us by the Greeks and Romans is meatier and more crowded with thought than any other literature. No wonder it has served as a model for centuries. By the way, here is still another reason. Our best English writers have, fortunately, been so filled with Greek and Roman thought that they cannot be fully understood by one who is not trained in the same way."

"Mr. Hamilton says Latin is all right, if you are going to teach Latin."

"Well, if that is the only reason for the study, it would be better to cut it off at once. Why should we train teachers in a useless subject so that they may teach other teachers a useless subject?"

"That does seem absurd."

"If the classics are not of use to doctors and lawyers and preachers and business men, I for one should be willing to have them abolished."

"Of what use are Greek and Latin to a lawyer?"

"For one thing, they make him better acquainted with his mother tongue—and he deals largely with language, you know. Then, better than any other study, they teach him to examine evidence with care and to weigh it fairly. They mold his taste and give him power to discriminate. They sharpen his mind for the stern business of his profession. That is more valuable than any amount of knowl-

edge of law cases, that is, if he is to be anything else than mediocre. Then there is the direct value of the classics to the Christian minister."

"Yes, I can understand that. You have told me before that the New Testament is written in Greek."

"Not only that, but the Old Testament too comes to English readers through the Greek translation rather than through the Hebrew. Of course the minister must study other things, social science and the like, but he cannot really know the book on which his religion is based unless he knows the Greek."

"How about the physician?"

"I have told you that the language of science is largely Greek and Latin. The physician who does not know these in the original learns his technical language only as a jargon. It is hard to think that he could create any part of it for himself, if he is anxious to progress that far."

"Well, I don't know what I want to become. Maybe I will become an engineer."

"Wait a moment. Let me get this book. Here! See what a distinguished professor of engineering says about his own studies: 'With a retrospect of twenty years, it seems to me I am warranted in saying that I could have better spared any other course that I took in high school than the Latin.' That opinion ought to be worth something. While I have the book open, see what this Chicago lawyer says: 'We cannot forget that, with very few exceptions, lawyers who have come to distinguish themselves in their profession and to be of use to the world have come *through* Latin or *through* Greek.' A famous minister and professor of theology says here: 'What-

ever phase is given to other methods of training for special work, Latin and Greek will remain as a necessary part of the equipment of the theological scholar.' Here is the testimony of a well-known and wealthy New York business man: 'A classical education is a large asset for any business man. His equipment for his life work is that much better, and will prove to be so in increasing measure as he rises to positions of responsibility and influence in his business and elsewhere.'"

"I surely didn't know that these big fellows thought so much of the classics."

"Unfortunately some of them do not. On some who have studied them the classics have been wasted, but thousands of the best of these men see the value of classical studies. There are many reasons, too, that you are now too young to understand. We'll talk about this again some day."

"I suppose I ought to go over and look at Jack's guinea pigs now."

"Ha! ha! All right, old man. Just let me read you this one paragraph from a rich New York banker. It will be good stuff for you to think about till next time. This man says:

"The great and legitimate aim of a business man is to make money, to provide for himself and his family such luxuries and comforts as his tastes and social standing demand. But when a man has reached the goal of his desires, when he has made his pile and desires to enjoy it, then comes the time for the making of the real and only balance sheet. Then he must ask himself, 'What are my resources, now that I have everything that money can buy? What are my spiritual and intellectual assets? How can I best spend what is left to me of life?' Lucky is the man

whose early training fits him for something more than the golf-field, or the tennis-court, and for something better than the gaming-table when his days of business activity are over. He can taste the gentler pleasures that await him in his study and by the blazing hearth-fire. His Sophocles, or his Plato, his Catullus or his Cicero, will make the winter of life seem like its early spring when the greatest struggle he knew was with the elusive rules of grammar and syntax. This busy world of ours cannot stop: it will always whirl and rush and hustle. But some of us — and the more the better — must learn that on one side of the rushing stream of life lie the peaceful backwaters, in which the clouds and the sun, the shrubs and the birds of the air appear reflected in their true, undistorted image, gently flowing on the limpid pool of reverie.' ”

“Well, I guess I don't want to drop the Latin, father. I can do it if I want to. I suppose I'll get on to the 'why' of it better later on. So long, Dad, I'm off.”

"Mankind exists, or should exist, not to live only, but, as Aristotle defines it, to live nobly. A noble and enjoyable life demands an imaginative participation in all that the human race has done, or said, or thought, that is excellent. The outcasts of Poker Flat, in Mr. Bret Harte's tale, consoling their last hours with the story of *Asheels* in Pope's *Iliad*, were living a nobler life than the comfortable citizen, who reads newspapers, and nothing but newspapers all day, and wakens with a fresh appetite for his morning journal. To keep up, to diffuse, as far as we may, interest in the best literature, is the duty of all who have been educated and called to this task."

—*Andrew Lang.*

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